

Notes and News

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES : 1965-66

Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxon. Trial excavations in 1965, followed in 1966 by the first full season of excavation on the site of the Long Barrow east of Coldwell Bridge were undertaken by D. Benson on behalf of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. The site is threatened by a scheme to widen the B.4473 Charlbury-Burford road. The eastern end of the barrow has been obscured by ploughing. There is evidence to suggest that the barrow was stone chambered although there is now no surface trace of this. Excavations were concentrated on the mound itself and revealed a barrow some 44 m. (144 ft.) long, 7 m. (23 ft.) wide at the western end broadening to possibly 14 m. (46 ft.) at the eastern end. Outer elements characteristic of Cotswold Long Barrows were revealed and consisted of an 'extra-revetment' and double stone wall with coarse stone backing, supporting a mound of mixed rubble and clay construction. At the rear (west) end of the barrow the inner wall had a rounded corner on the north side, but the corner of the outer wall was probably squared off. Internally a series of cross partitions of large rubble construction had been built up from the base of the mound and linked to a central axial spine of small limestone slabs. 19th-century quarrying had removed all traces of outer elements and any quarry ditches on the south side, but on the north, irregular quarry pits had been dug to provide some of the material for the mound. Only a relatively small area beneath the barrow was examined; this was prolific in occupation material, including some Mesolithic flint. Excavations are to continue in 1967. (SP/299175.)

Asthall, Oxon. Part of a shallow stone mortarium was found by Christopher Walker at the well-known Roman site. (SP/285112.)

Bampton, Oxon. A limited amount of excavation was undertaken by the Royal Signals Archaeological Club under the direction of the secretary, Mr. G. Williams, on an area which is close to the south-eastern perimeter of the camp and has produced Romano-British pottery in the past. No important features were found to exist in the area investigated, but small weathered Romano-British sherds, some minute fragments of samian and a small Belgic sherd were recovered. An account of the excavation with details of other finds from the area has been published by Mr. Williams for the Royal Signals Archaeological Club and he has kindly allowed these notes to be compiled from that account. Casual finds from the vicinity include a bronze brooch of thistle type, suggested by Mr. M. R. Hull to be a pre-Conquest import and dateable to the second quarter of the 1st century A.D. (SP/319033), and an Iron A sherd with incised decoration and punched dots filled with white inlay¹ (SP/319033). Previous finds including some samian, 1st-2nd-century coarse wares and three 1st-century bronze brooches are described and illustrated. (SP/313017.)

Cassington, Oxon. On the site of the disused gravel pit to the south of Purwell Farm, in an horizon protected by dumped topsoil, grass-tempered Saxon pottery, charcoal and animal bones were recorded by Mr. B. V. Arthur. (SP/44461168.)

Dorchester, Oxon. At Berinsfield, on an 85 acre site being developed for housing by Bullington R.D.C., sites and finds of Prehistoric and Roman date have been recorded.

¹ Almost identical to the sherd from Calais Farm, *V.C.H. Oxon.* 1, 254 and pl. xia.

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(1) In area SP/574967, following removal of topsoil down to natural clay in preparation for house foundations, a north-south linear spread of small features was detected and planned over a distance of 120 ft. These features consisted of concentrations of charcoal and black clayey loam and, in plan, exhibited a variety of shapes from indistinct amorphous spreads to vaguely rectangular patches up to 5 ft. in length and 3 ft. in width. The features were evenly spaced at intervals of c. 5 ft. No excavation was possible, but occupation material collected from the surface included fragments of animal bone, burnt flint and sherds of Bronze Age and possibly Neolithic date.

(2) In area SP/576963, a small pottery kiln, probably Roman, was pillaged and destroyed before any recording could be carried out.

(3) In area SP/575962, surface stone scatter indicated foundations of a rectangular building. Occupation material, including numerous Romano-British sherds, was found in the vicinity and Roman coins are known to have been recovered from the same area.

(4) In area SP/575961, immediately to the east of the site of Allen's pit, topsoil stripping revealed a complex of subrectangular enclosures and occupation material of Iron Age and Roman dates.

(5) Levelling of part of the Roman road running across the centre of the whole site produced no satisfactory evidence of its construction. At SP/574961 topsoil stripping revealed quarry pits for gravel for the Roman road and traces of linear ditches.

(6) A sherd of a Middle Bronze Age sub-biconical urn² was reported by the Rev. Fabian Radcliffe, O.P.

Eaton Hastings, Berks. An iron spearhead with leaf-shaped blade, of the late Saxon period, was dredged from the River Thames at Grafton Lock and presented to the Ashmolean Museum by Mrs. F. M. Haskins. (Ashmolean Museum: 1966.1162 SU/273993.)

Enstone, Oxon. A Neolithic polished stone axe (FIG. 11), found at Church Enstone, was presented to the Oxford City and County Museum by Mr. R. Johnston. Superficially this axe appears to be of Lake District origin and it is one that has evidently been broken and reground. The axe is 10 cm. long, with a slightly rounded butt end 3.5 cm. wide and rounded side facets 8 mm. wide. This latter feature is characteristic of the variant A form of 'Cumbrian' axe described by Manby.³

Great Tew, Oxon. During the preparation of a site for a new barn at Beaconsfield Farm, further Romano-British remains were brought to light immediately north of the remains discovered under similar circumstances in 1950.⁴ A watching brief for the Ministry of Public Building and Works was held by D. Benson of the Oxford City & County Museum and a limited amount of excavation was also carried out. Traces of a north-south wing with a corridor facing east on to a yard were discovered. There was a suggestion of a similar wing with corridor on the south side of the yard. Excavation of a part of the north-south wing revealed several periods of construction and occupation from the 2nd to 4th centuries. Part of a hypocaust below a destroyed tessellated pavement was located. Several rooms had originally had painted plaster walls. A hoard of 72 coins provide a *terminus post quem* late in the 3rd century for the

² Cf. Long Wittenham Urnfield, Berks. *Oxoniensia*, xxix/xxx (1964/5), 71, fig. 29.

³ *Trans. Cumberland & Westmorland A. & S. Lxv* (1965), 8.

⁴ *Oxoniensia*, xv (1950), 107.

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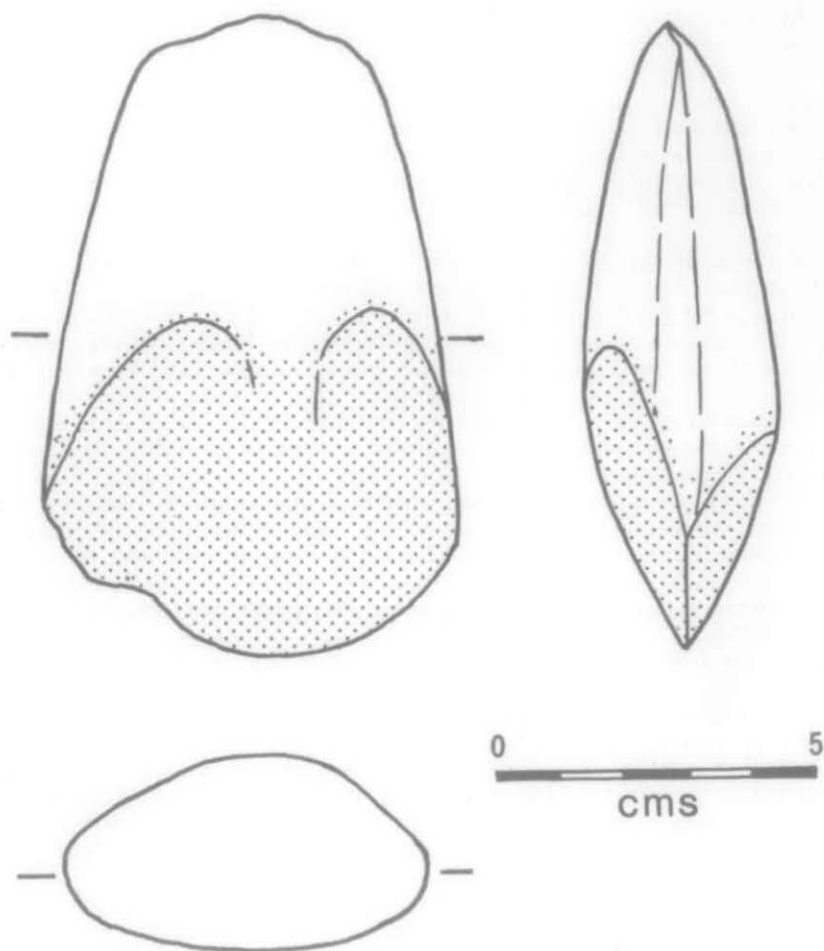


FIG. 11

Polished stone axe from Church Enstone. The stippled area represents the reground portion.

destruction of this wing. Overlying one of the destroyed rooms were the remnants of a 7th-century inhumation, originally covered by a small cairn. During further bulldozing, a small shallow pit containing a fragment of a collared urn was discovered.

Cumulative evidence from this site suggests the remains of a large courtyard house. Aerial photographs indicate another range of buildings running east-west some 300 ft. north of the present farm-house. Further remains of the north-south wing extend into the field to the west of the farm buildings. (SP/406275.)

Kidlington, Oxon. An Early Iron Age bone weaving comb was found by D. Bake

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in a ploughed field immediately south of the junction of the A.43 road and the minor road to Islip. (SP/511145.)

Middleton Stoney, Oxon. 12th-century sherds were recovered from the spoil of a recently-dug grave in the north-east corner of the graveyard surrounding All Saints' Church.⁵ This part of the graveyard lies within an outer enclosure probably associated with the castle. (SP/53142324.)

North Hinksey, Berks. Mrs. D. Swayne reported a polished flint axe, found 2½ ft. deep in dark loam in digging a trench at no. 12, the Village. (SP/495054.)

Oxford, Albert Place. Excavations on the site of Blackfriars were directed by the Rev. F. Radcliffe, O.P., Messrs. T. Hassall and N. Jackson on behalf of the Oxford City & County Museum. Traces of the wall, discovered in the 1961 excavations on the east side of Albert Street and then thought to be the south wall of the church, were located again. This wall now appears to be the sleeper wall for the arcade between the nave and the north aisle. Further discoveries include a possible porch and a boundary wall between the approach and the friars' precinct. (SP/51210585.)

Oxford, 114 High Street. A collection of Medieval and later pottery, found in 1934, has been loaned to the Ashmolean Museum by Major P. I. C. Payne. (SP/51520621.)

Pusey, Berks. A Middle Bronze Age bronze palstave was found in a field north-west of Cherbury Camp. (SU/373965.)

Radley, Berks. An iron spearhead, of late Medieval date, was found by Mr. R. E. Deane when clearing out a ditch at Park Farm. (SU/523997.)

South Weston, Oxon. A Neolithic macehead of fine-grained rock of cushion-type was found by Mrs. P. Brown in upcast from a stream, 350 yards downstream from the Rectory. (c. SU/981700.)

Standlake, Oxon. A 2nd-century necked jar was found by Mr. Godfrey on a stripped surface at the gravel pit south of Brighthampton. (c. SP/382024.)

Stanton Harcourt, Oxon. A lower Palaeolithic Middle Acheulian flint hand-axe was found by Mr. R. Ayres in a dump at Messrs. Smith's gravel pit on the former aerodrome. (SP/411050.)

Stonesfield, Oxon. On a narrow tongue of ground scarped by two ancient river valleys on the north-west side of the village, shallow pits and ditches were noted following stripping and trenching on a housing site. Occupation material was recovered from the surface and included pottery dated by Mr. D. Harding to the late 4th-early 3rd centuries B.C. (SP/39081736.)

Swalcliffe, Oxon. A fragment of a quern of Millstone Grit was found within the interior of Madmarston Camp. (SP/386389.)

Tadmerton, Oxon. Mr. J. M. Fearon reported a sherd of a Romano-British flagon of painted ware,⁶ probably of the 4th century, from the golf course. (SP/356388.)

Thame, Oxon. Mr. J. M. Castle reported a small Belgic jar, dug up several years ago by a badger. The jar is of pinky buff, chalky fabric and has an irregularly thrown body and well-made rim. It is intact, and comes presumably from a burial group.⁷ No trace of ash or bone was noticed in the badger's spoil. (c. SP/697062.)

DON BENSON.
P. D. C. BROWN.

⁵ Cf. *Oxoniensia*, xiii (1948), 69.

⁶ Cf. Churchill Hospital kilns, *Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1952/3), 224.

⁷ Cf. Callow Hill, *Oxoniensia*, xxii (1957), fig. 10, 6 and Watlington, *Oxoniensia*, xxiii (1958), 139.

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ANOTHER SAXON SCEAT FROM OXFORDSHIRE

In the last issue of this journal (Vol. xxix/xxx, 193) Dr. D. M. Metcalf published an interesting coin of the 8th century, a Saxon sceat or penny, found on an allotment at Banbury. The excavations at the Roman site at Shakenoak Farm, Wilcote, Oxon,⁸ 3 miles north-east of Witney, have now also produced a sceat, (FIG. 12), the sixth known from Oxfordshire.⁹



FIG. 12 (2/1)

Obverse: Diademed bust to right, holding cross; border of dots.

Reverse: Serpent curled into circle, the body composed of dots; all within wire torque, with border of dots.

0.94 gm. = 14.5 grains. Apparently good silver and almost unworn. Cf. C. F. Keary; *A catalogue of English coins in the British Museum, Anglo-Saxon series*, Vol. I, 17, nos. 151-5. (Type 32 (a).)

Like the Banbury coin, this sceat is of a type considered by Rigold to be fairly early in the sceatta series, closely following his primary series.¹⁰ It may therefore be dated to soon after A.D. 725, though perhaps as late as A.D. 750. The number of provenances of this type known previously is small, consisting of one from Southampton, three from Kent, one from London and two from Yorkshire. Rigold suggested that the type was Kentish in origin, but examination of all known examples suggests strongly that more than one centre of production is involved.¹¹

Archaeologically the find is remarkable. The number of sceattas found in actual excavations is small, and this is the first, so far as is known, to be found at a Roman villa. The first report on the Shakenoak site will be published during 1968, but as this report will be concerned solely with one of the buildings it is perhaps worthwhile to outline the evidence for the occupation during the dark ages, as it stands at present. The villa consists of at least three buildings, of which two have been excavated. A stream runs through the middle of the site. The first building is shown by the coin evidence to have continued in use well into the 5th century; at some later date it was used as a cemetery. The second building, on the opposite side of the stream, produced the sceat in the topsoil;¹² the surrounding area has produced pottery of the 7th or 8th centuries, together with loom weights and objects in bone, iron and bronze, all of about the same period. So far no certain evidence has been found for occupation during the later 5th and 6th centuries.

D. R. WALKER.

⁸ *Antiquity*, xxxvi (1962), 219; *JRS*, LII, 175 and LIII, 165.

⁹ C. H. V. Sutherland, 'Anglo-Saxon sceattas in England', *Num. Chron.* 6 ser., II (1942), 42.

¹⁰ S. E. Rigold, 'The two primary series of sceattas', *Brit. Num. Journ.* xxx (1960/1), 6.

¹¹ The problem will be discussed in greater detail in a forthcoming numismatic journal.

¹² Building B, square T 21, at a depth of 6 ins.

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AN IRON AGE SITE AT KIRTLINGTON, OXON.

In August 1966, during trenching along the north side of Akeman Street in connexion with the new North Oxfordshire water main, traces of an extensive Iron Age site were revealed in the two fields due west of the junction of Akeman Street and Port Way (FIG. 13). The Roman road surface had been ploughed out to a depth of 20 cms. below the present ground surface, but some basal limestone rubble remained and was visible for the most part only in the south side of the trench. Finds and features were recorded as follows:

(1) Inhumation. Recorded by workmen somewhere between 90 and 120 m. west of the eastern boundary of the field. Apparently an extended burial orientated east-west along the length of the trench.

(2) Extensive area of burnt clay, charcoal and ash, 50 cm. below ground level.

(3) Rim sherd (FIG. 14B), 80-90 cm. below ground level in a horizontal spread of dark brown loam and charcoal.

(4) Kiln or oven, in the south side of the trench. When examined this feature had been extensively disturbed. Large roughly-dressed limestone blocks *c.* 20 × 30 × 25 cms. had been subject to considerable heat and appeared to have formed a roughly semi-circular southern end to a structure whose external dimensions can have been no more than 60 cms. wide, 125 cms. long and 40 cms. in height. A quantity of fired clay packing also came from this feature. The fill was not recorded but apparently contained the fragments of jar E.

(5) Extended inhumation, orientated north-south, head to the south. Buried in a shallow grave 20 cms. deep, cut into gravelly subsoil 85 cms. below ground level.

(6) Extended adult inhumation, orientated north-south, head to the south. The skull was recovered intact from the south face of the trench. The burial was clearly stratified beneath the limestone rubble at the base of, or spread from, the Roman road. The top of a shallow grave 20 cms. deep, cut into gravelly subsoil *c.* 30 cms. below ground level, was separated from the base of the limestone rubble by 4 cms. of dark brown sand. No trace of grave goods was found.

(7) Pit. North side of trench. Small with irregular sides *c.* 40 cms. wide and 50 cms. deep, cut into orange sandy subsoil 45 cms. below ground level. The fill was of dark brown sand and contained the fragments of bowl A.

The fragments of jars C, D and F were reported to have been found in the trench somewhere between (4) and (7). Their association is not certain.

DON BENSON.

CATALOGUE OF THE POTTERY (FIG. 14)

- A. Outer face: originally smooth orange-brown, now sooted, warped, flaking badly above carination, some small grits showing; inner face: moderately smooth, orange-brown, warped, sooted, some small shell grits; section: well-fired black ware, some grits.
- B. Outer face: moderately smooth orange ware, slightly sooted, slightly pitted surface; inner face: moderately smooth orange-brown, several grits, some horizontal smoothing marks; section: hard well-fired orange ware, some grits. D. *c.* 11-12 ins.
- C. Outer face: rough grey-buff, some streak marks, many shell grits, surface much pitted; inner face: worn rough, blackened, shelly; section: grey-black shelly fabric. D. *c.* 9½ ins.

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- D. Outer face: moderately smooth but uneven, light brown ware, sooted black in patches, pitted surface, some shell grits on shoulder; inner face: light brown ware, pitted surface, some shell grits; section: black, friable, shelly fabric.
- E. Outer face: uneven, orange-brown ware, 'thumbed' surface, many grits, some shell; inner face: moderately smooth but uneven, worn in patches, some shell grits; section: friable brown ware, some shell grits.
- F. Outer face: moderately rough, buff ware, many shell grits, very pitted; inner face: very worn brown ware, patches of black showing through the surface, some shell grits; section: friable black ware, some shell grits. D. 9-9½ ins.

D. W. HARDING.

THE POTTERY FROM KIRTLINGTON, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLIEST IRON AGE IN THE UPPER THAMES REGION

It was formerly believed that the earliest phase of the Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley was represented by the angular jar and bowl series, for which Long Wittenham was regarded as the regional type-site.¹³ For vessels A and B from Kirtlington affinities with the angular tradition would have been invoked, while the coarse ware jars C and F would have been regarded as 'degenerate' derivatives of the primary 'situla' form. The whole assemblage in consequence would have been attributed to the 'A2' phase of the Iron Age in the region, and its dating lowered accordingly.

With the much-extended chronology for the Iron Age now current, however, it is clear that there must have been an earlier ceramic style, pre-dating the 'Angular Phase' of the late 5th-early 4th century, comparable to that represented in Wessex by the assemblages from All Cannings Cross¹⁴ and Longbridge Deverill Cow Down, Wilts., for which a date early in the 6th century would no longer be considered excessively *avant-garde*. The characteristics displayed by the Kirtlington pottery in both form and fabric are consistent with its interpretation as belonging to this earlier phase—the counterpart in the Upper Thames of Wessex First A.

Certain features of the Kirtlington bowl A distinguish it from the bowls which are characteristic of the 'Angular Phase'. First, it is considerably larger in overall dimensions than the small, shallow bowls of Long Wittenham. Second, the Kirtlington bowl is in a grittier orange-brown ware which is quite different from Savory's 'egg-shell' thin black-burnished bowls. In fact, the closest parallel for the Kirtlington example in both these respects is afforded by the bowl found by Mr. R. Grace at Standlake in 1939, in association with a number of vessels whose decoration allies them very closely with the ceramic fashions of the earliest Iron Age in Wessex.¹⁵

The jar fragment B likewise need have no particular connexion with the Long Wittenham group of angular jars. That there was a form of shouldered jar with everted rim in the earliest pre-angular Iron Age is demonstrated in Wessex by the elaborately decorated fine ware vessels from Longbridge Deverill and though such exotic examples are not to be found in the Upper Thames region, the profile of this

¹³ *Oxoniensis*, II (1937), 1-11.

¹⁴ M. E. Cunnington, *All Cannings Cross* (1923).

¹⁵ *Antiq. Journ.* xxii (1942), 209 and fig. 3.

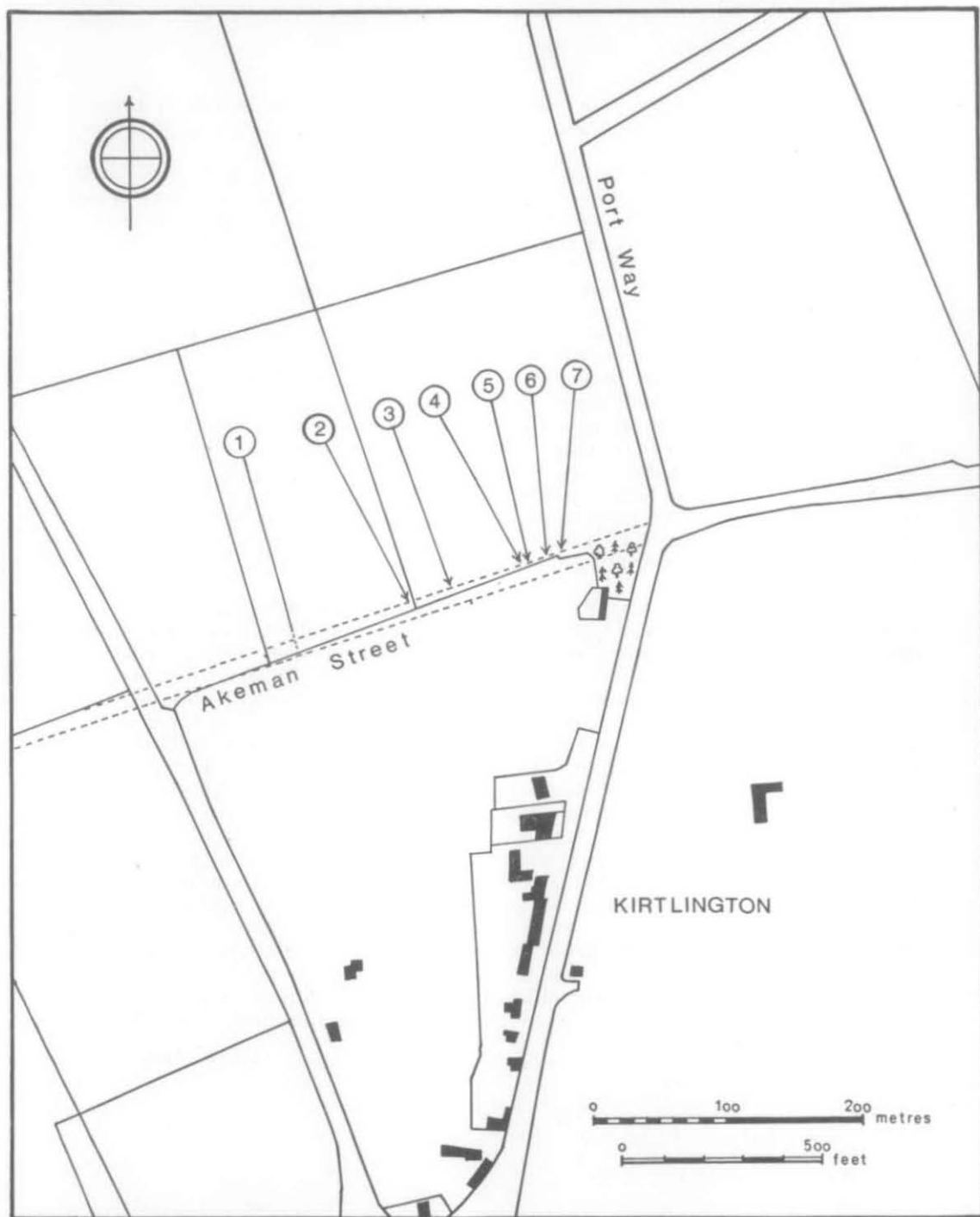


FIG. 13
Finds from Kirtlington.

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fragment and that of a jar from Allen's Pit, Dorchester,¹⁶ are perhaps sufficiently close to suggest that there was a variant of the form in this region during the First A culture phase.

The affinities of D and E, on the other hand, are less obviously with Wessex. Jar D, with its somewhat round-shouldered bipartite form belongs within a category of jars whose distribution is primarily eastern and south-eastern, where it appears in contexts consistent with an early Iron A dating. The nearest parallel for the Kirtlington example, however, is from Mount Farm, Dorchester,¹⁷ where there are also close parallels for the two coarse ware jars, C and F. In the light of the revised chronology for the Iron Age, it is becoming increasingly difficult to accept Myres' conclusion that the Mount Farm series represented an 'unbroken occupation throughout the Iron Age and early Roman times', and it now seems more probable that the Iron Age pottery from the site divides broadly between Mount Farm I, to which the cauldron-like vessels with expanded rim among others belonged, and Mount Farm II, which included the proto-beadrim bowl, and between which a truly angular phase is, for the most part, absent. Mount Farm I could then be regarded chronologically as falling within the same period as the early material from Standlake, and the Kirtlington assemblage.

One final problem of form is posed by jar E from Kirtlington, whose profile is so elementary that parallels are not especially meaningful in cultural terms. The existence of a straight-sided jar form in the earliest phase of the Iron Age is attested by the simple bucket-profiles from Eastbourne,¹⁸ but a close derivation for the form remains a matter for further research.

There remains the question of fabric and decoration. The Kirtlington jars contain many shell grits in a manner typical of Iron A pottery in the Upper Thames. In addition, the fabric of several of the coarse ware vessels is pitted with small holes—an effect which could result from the firing out of vegetable matter in the clay. In this respect the fabric of the Kirtlington jar is reminiscent of the 'corky' fabric generally associated with Bronze Age ceramics, and the Kirtlington wares are in fact most closely paralleled in the region by the fragments from Yarnton¹⁹ for which a Bronze Age dating has sometimes been argued. Two of the Kirtlington jars are decorated with finger-tip ornament along the shoulder in a fashion typical of Iron Age coarse ware jars, but as at Minnis Bay, Kent,²⁰ the finger-tipping is by no means as prominent as it generally is in Iron A contexts in Wessex.

With the present lack of definitive associations, any assessment of Iron Age pottery in terms of absolute chronology is subject to qualification. But the accumulation of further evidence may well bring about a revision of the ceramic sequence formerly accepted for the Upper Thames, whereby it will appear that pottery forms such as those from Kirtlington were current in the earliest phase of the Iron Age in the region, in the 6th–5th centuries B.C., and that, far from representing a process of degeneration from the Angular style of Long Wittenham, Woodeaton and Chinnor²¹ these constituted the indigenous ceramic forms upon which the Angular mode intruded at the end of the 5th century.

D. W. HARDING.

¹⁶ *Oxoniensis*, VII (1942), fig. 9, 2.

¹⁷ *Oxoniensis*, II (1937), 12, fig. 8.

¹⁸ *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* xxviii (1962), 140.

¹⁹ *Oxoniensis*, VII (1942), fig. 12, 51 *et al.*

²⁰ *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* ix (1943), 28–47.

²¹ *Antiq. Journ.* xxxi (1951), 132–48.

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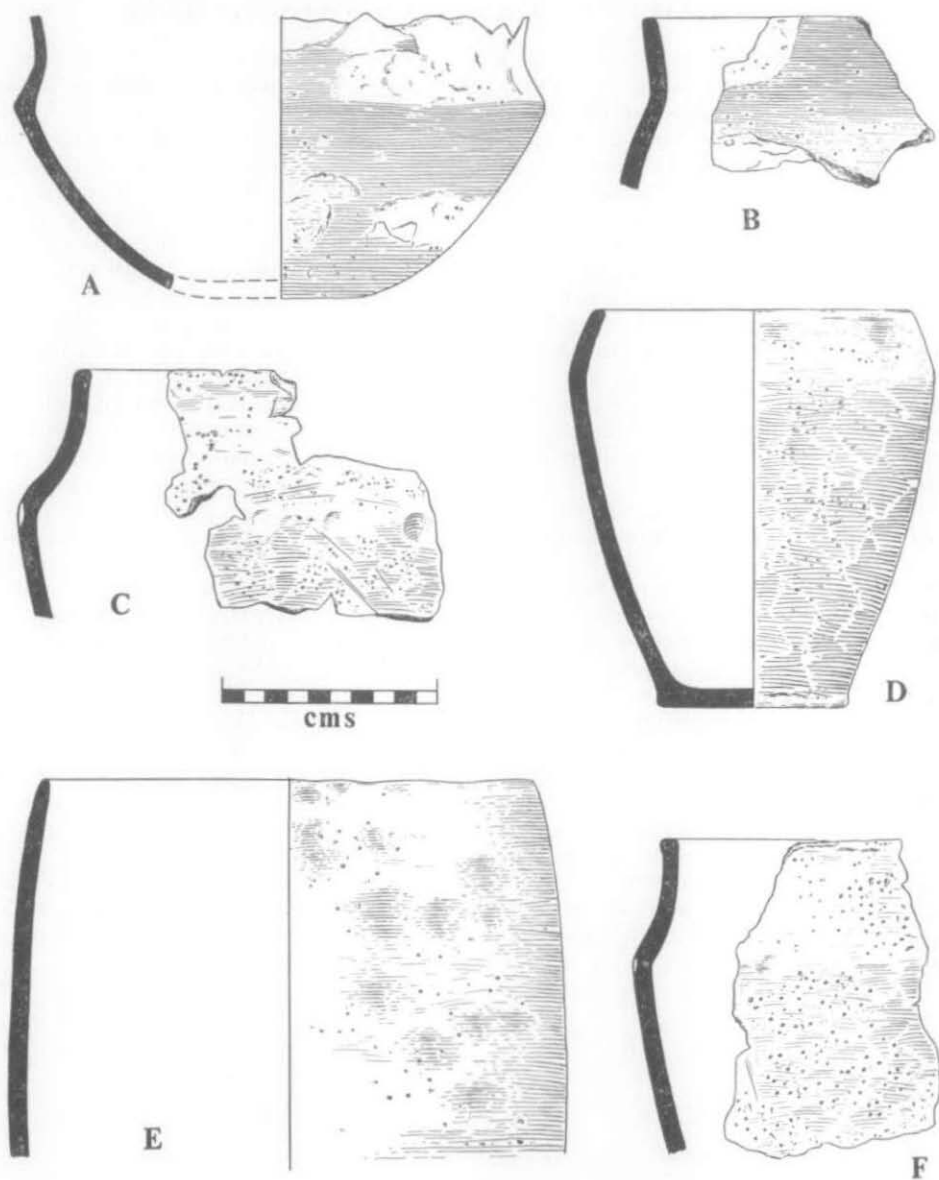


FIG. 14
Early Iron Age pottery from Kirtlington.

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A NEOLITHIC FLINT AXE FROM WITNEY, OXON.

I am very grateful to Mr. C. M. Kitchen of Chipping Norton for allowing me to examine, and later to publish a note on the flint axe he found while working for the Southern Electricity Board at Witney some six years ago.

The site of the find lies to the south-west of the town,²² beside the brook which encircles the western and southern sides of Witney, and which in itself is the remnant of an abandoned meander of the River Windrush. Mr. Kitchen states that the axe lay at the bottom of a layer of loam c. 18 ins. deep, resting on a level of chalk, in a hole for the erection of a pole. The pole is one just north of the pathway over the brook leading from the Ducklington road up to raised ground at the south side of one of Early's blanket mills in the road called The Crofts.

The axe, an unpolished chipped flint, opaque and of a pearly grey colour is in good condition. It is $7\frac{3}{8}$ ins. long, $2\frac{3}{4}$ ins. broad at the blade end, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ins. at the butt and on average $1\frac{1}{4}$ ins. thick (PL. VI). There are two intrusive flaws in the flint, one near the butt has what appears to be wear from binding, as if to a haft, but there is no corresponding wear on the opposite side. The axe shows wear on its side edges but still retains a fairly sharp edge to the blade. It may be dated to the early Neolithic period of c. 3000 B.C.

The site of Witney calls for note, since the name confirms its position as an island, 'Wittta's island'.²³ It is situated on raised ground formed by a bed of Jurassic limestone and Cornbrash, around which the River Windrush flows by several channels from the higher ground of the Cotswolds onto the flood plain of the upper Thames valley. The chalk-like appearance of the filling below the alluvium by the brook mentioned by Mr. Kitchen, is a layer of decalcified white limestone and not chalk. A similar feature was seen under alluvium during excavations below parts of the Roman villa at North Leigh, near Witney.

Witney, therefore, as an island with natural defences may have long been used for occupation, even as early as Neolithic times, although a single find of this period as in the present case is not enough to draw such a conclusion. There are, however, records of a perforated stone mace-head,²⁴ as well as a bronze sword,²⁵ the latter of the late Bronze Age and found on the east side of the town, while much of prehistoric periods has been found in the near vicinity, at Standlake and Stanton Harcourt, sites on the gravel spreads of the Windrush, a little south of Witney. By historical times Witney figures prominently in the late Saxon period where a rampart or bank of that period is said to have existed along the inner side of the brook, mentioned above, defining the boundary of the Saxon town, but of which little remains today.²⁶

HELEN E. O'NEIL.

²² SP/352092.

²³ E. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*, 503.

²⁴ *Archaeologia*, LXXI (1921), 227.

²⁵ *Oxoniensis*, XXII (1957), 106, pl. VII, C.

²⁶ *Oxoniensis*, XXIV, 102 (1959).

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THE RECORDS OF THE BANBURY MONTHLY MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

The records of the Banbury Monthly Meeting have recently been deposited in Oxfordshire County Record Office and are now catalogued as BMM I-X. They cover a period from the middle of the 17th century to the early years of the 20th and provide much useful information about North Oxfordshire Quakers, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Quakers first came into Oxfordshire soon after 1650 and Banbury seems to have been their principal centre.²⁷ When the hierarchy of quarterly and monthly meetings was established in 1668 there was a quarterly meeting for Oxfordshire with three constituent meetings—Banbury, Warborough and Witney.²⁸ Though these monthly meetings bear the name of a single meeting they were responsible for the various congregations in the north, south and central-west parts of the county respectively. In 1790 Oxfordshire Quarterly Meeting was united with Berkshire under the style Berks. & Oxon. Quarterly Meeting. The following year Vale (or White Horse) Monthly Meeting was dissolved, its meetings being divided between Witney Monthly Meeting and Warborough. Warborough itself was united to Reading Monthly Meeting in 1810.

The monthly meetings were the basic administrative and executive units. They were responsible for all membership matters—admission of 'convinced Friends', recommendations of those moving to other meetings, pastoral care of the sick and poor and the visitation (and in the last resort disownment) of those whose conduct was 'disorderly'. They were responsible also for the care of marriages, enquiring into the clearness of the parties from other engagements, and they had authority to 'liberate' Friends recognized as having a gift in the ministry for service beyond their borders. Finally they were responsible for administering bequests and properties such as graveyards and meeting houses. Most of these duties were in fact deputed to two or three individuals or to the constituent meetings which were usually made responsible for the supervision of repairs and alterations to meeting houses when these were authorized by the monthly meeting. Until the end of the 19th century the men and women held their business meetings separately although they worshipped together. It was customary for the men to depute women to make enquiries when women members required certificates or were involved in difficulties, and the women were given considerable freedom in the distribution of money to the sick and poor.

The monthly meeting as the basic unit was subordinate to the quarterly meeting which was in turn subordinate to the Yearly Meeting for the whole nation. A series of queries, to be answered in writing, was at first devised to elicit certain facts but was later used as a touchstone for uniform administration of the discipline. Subordinate to the monthly meeting were preparative meetings, so called because their original function was to prepare the business (and in particular the answers to the queries) for the monthly meeting. A preparative meeting was normally a single congregation but sometimes comprised two or even more local meetings for worship. Originally Banbury had four constituent meetings at Adderbury, Banbury, Sibford and South Newington. A meeting of Hook Norton was opened in 1705 and held its preparative meeting jointly with Sibford from 1810 until it was closed in 1880. It was subsequently opened as an 'allowed' meeting 1893-97, 1905-10, 1914-32. South Newington held

²⁷ *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii 47-8; A. Beesley, *History of Banbury* (London, N.D.), 451-2.

²⁸ I am indebted to the Librarian of the Society of Friends for help with the history of the various meetings in the area and with the details of Quaker administration.

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its preparative meeting jointly with Sibford from 1810 until it was closed in 1825; it was opened again as an 'allowed' meeting 1893-1911. There were also meetings in the 18th century at Bicester and Shutford. Shutford was joined with Banbury in 1787 and the Bicester meeting ceased to send representatives after 1777 although its name appears in the minute books as a constituent meeting until 1789. Minutes of these preparative meetings exist from 1696 for Banbury (with accounts from 1661) and from 1804 for Sibford. 19th-century birth and burial records exist for these two and Adderbury.

The surviving records of the monthly meeting itself consist of minute books, records of sufferings, title deeds, epistles and circulars issued by the Yearly Meeting, accounts and a quantity of correspondence and other papers mainly relating to the keeping of the Meeting's registers and its properties. The men's minutes, 1736-1905, give a brief but continuous and informative account of their work as outlined above. The women's minutes, forming a separate series 1677-1896, are mainly an account of disbursements made to people in need. Details of special allowances for clothing and rent are frequently given, especially in the later minutes, and it would be interesting to compare the Quaker's disbursements with those made out of the poor rates by parish overseers. The records of sufferings for Banbury are unfortunately almost non-existent until the very end of the 18th century. The minute book which covers the period 1700-22 contains only the briefest of orders for accounts to be made up, but it is possible that fuller accounts may survive among the records of Oxfordshire Quarterly Meeting. The Quakers were very frequently distrained for non-payment of church rates and tithes and kept careful account of what was claimed and of the value of the goods taken. On occasion they were imprisoned, but the bare record of the minutes gives no clue to the real difficulties of the Banbury meeting at this time. The later accounts, 1794-1860, set out the amounts demanded and taken both in money and in kind and record whether any surplus taken was repaid.

The registers of the meeting cover births, marriages and burials and also membership and certificates issued and received for people leaving or coming into the meeting. The original registers go back to 1685, the earliest relating mainly though not entirely to the Sibford meeting. The records include, however, an abstract of the Quarterly Meeting registers up to 1837 which takes births back to 1632, marriages to 1648 and burials to 1665 and it seems that these are the earliest non-Anglican registers to survive for Banbury and the surrounding region. Three volumes in another collection in the County Record Office (*catalogue mark: A*) take the registers up to 1868. Registers of members were kept from 1837 and the deposited register goes up to 1859. These registers are often of very great interest since they give, among other things, details of how and when each member joined and left the meeting. Banbury at this period lost members only when they died or left the area, but in some cases during the 19th century meetings lost members to a variety of nonconformist bodies and even to the Church of England.

Since the meeting houses in the Horse Fair at Banbury and at Sibford Gower are in current use the main series of their title deeds is not part of the deposit, but there are series running from the late 17th century for the houses at Shutford and South Newington. Very full accounts, together with an estimate, survive for the rebuilding of Banbury meeting house at the time when it was enlarged in the middle of the 18th century and there are 19th-century plans of the house and its graveyard. In addition to entries in the minute books and the title deeds, accounts and papers survive which throw more light on the history of the other meeting houses particularly during the

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19th century. When the constituent meeting at Hook Norton became too small to need a meeting house it was let to the Primitive Methodists and at a later date enquiries about it were received from the Salvation Army. It was subsequently demolished.²⁹ The meeting house at Shutford was converted and let as cottages.

As well as a number of legacies the meeting owned a farm at North Newington which was bequeathed to them in 1725 by John Grafton for the income to be applied to the relief of the poor members of the meeting. The original bequest consisted of a moiety only of the farm and it was not until the middle of the 19th century that the meeting acquired the whole property. There are also mid-19th-century sketch plans including one showing proposed alterations and an illuminating scrap of paper with a list of the various people in the immediate neighbourhood who were accustomed to draw water from the pump and well at the back of the house. The majority of the title deeds both for the Grafton Charity and the meeting houses are appointments of trustees which throw an interesting light on the status and occupations of the leading Quakers in the area. The trustees usually included a number of yeomen and farmers, but in the 18th century the majority were tradesmen and craftsmen in the villages round Banbury, while in the 19th century they were more often professional people living in Banbury itself.

In addition to the various special accounts mentioned above there are receipt and disbursement books 1728-33 and 1804-85 and separate accounts for travelling expenses 1688-1770, as well as monthly collection books for the 18th century. All these need to be used in conjunction with the minute books to give anything like a complete picture of the meeting's day to day finances. The largest single disbursement was usually the lump sum paid each month to the women's meeting for the sick and for poor relief. Although Sibford School, which was established in 1841 by the quarterly meetings for Berks. & Oxon., Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, lay within the Banbury area, the monthly meeting does not seem to have made regular contributions to it until 1861 from which time it is always included in the annual statements of account for the meeting's charities.

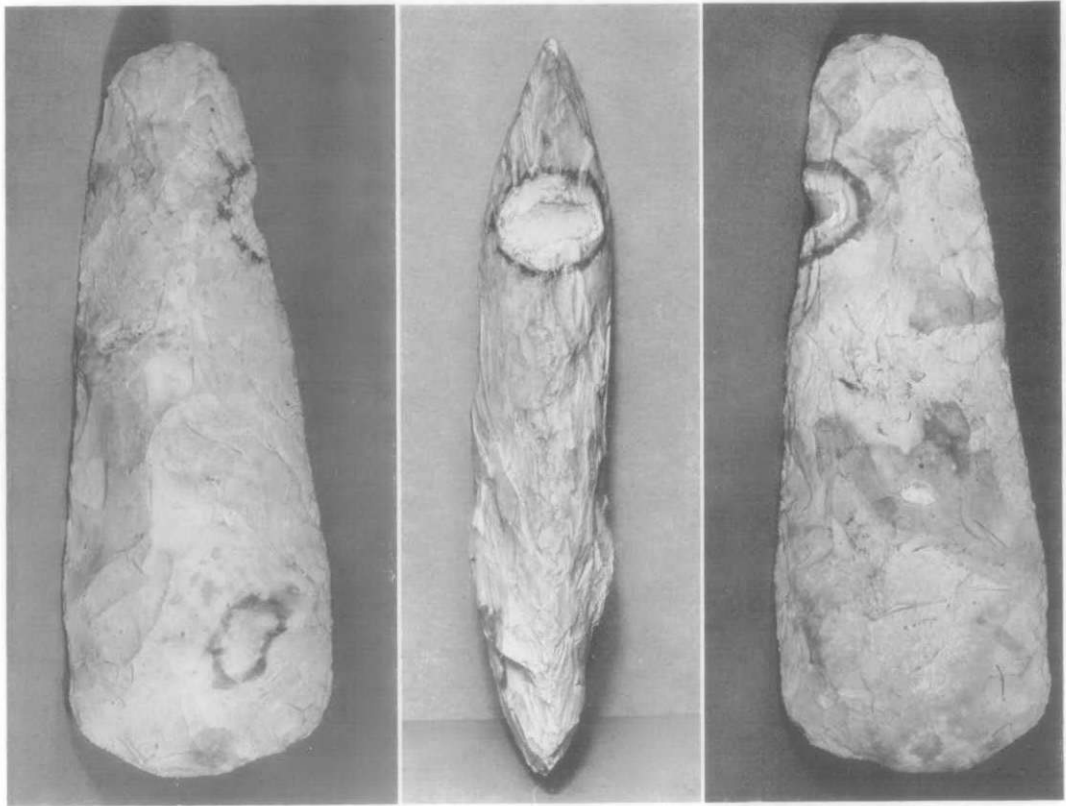
Apart from the meeting's own records there is one apparent stray deposited with them, a commonplace book containing several pieces of prose and verse dated between 1755 and 1771. On the back cover are the words 'Elizabeth French Her Book' and a page inside gives her address as Sibford. She was probably, though not certainly, the daughter of Thomas and Hannah French of Sibford who married John Enoch in 1792 and died at the age of seventy-six in 1835. The book is mainly taken up with a long account of the life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, 1713-55, which was not infrequently copied into 18th-century commonplace books.²⁹ The other prose piece is an account of a dream about a visit to heaven, hell and purgatory dated 1762. The poems are mostly elegies for the sick or the dead, some of them possibly written by Elizabeth French herself. The last entry is a long verse paraphrase of part of the book of Job written in a rather high-flown literary style.

The information given in the monthly meeting's own records needs to be supplemented from those of the Oxfordshire Quarterly Meeting and, after 1790, the Berks. & Oxon. Quarterly Meeting in the Berkshire County Record Office at Reading and from those at Friends House in London. There are scattered references in the Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions Records and more material is to be found among the Diocesan Records in the Bodleian Library.

E. D. PAUL.

²⁹ Information given by the Librarian to the Society of Friends.

PLATE VI



0 1 6 INCHES

FLINT AXE FROM WITNEY