

A further Middle Palaeolithic Bout Coupé Handaxe from Radley, Oxfordshire

Two bout coupé handaxes from Abingdon and Radley, and a third from a quarry near Oxford, were previously reported in *Oxoniensia*, vol. 47 (1983) by J.A. Tyldesley and *Oxoniensia*, vol. 65 (2000) by R.M.G. Eeles and J.P. Wallis. A further handaxe recovered from the same area, which is the subject of this note, was found by Mr Geoffrey Cross of Abingdon, and remains in his possession. This handaxe was collected from a gravel-sorting machine at Tuckwell's Pit, Radley (SU 525977). The exact stratigraphical location of the gravels being extracted at the time remains unknown, but Tuckwell's Pit quarries the Thames Floodplain Terrace, generally regarded as of Devensian age.¹ Although this bout coupé handaxe was recovered from an unstratified context, it is from the same quarry in which one of the others was found. Whilst individual unstratified finds may add little to our understanding of the period, they do, at the very least, attest to the presence of Neanderthals in the local landscape. Bout coupé handaxes that can be dated, such as those from the near in situ lithic assemblage excavated at the Lynford Quarry, Norfolk in 2002,² are found in association with fauna of the Pin Hole Mammalian Assemblage Zone of the mid Devensian (59–24,000 years BP).³ Excavation of larger assemblages under controlled research conditions, such as that undertaken at Lynford Quarry, allow us to investigate aspects of lithic deposition, tool technology and microwear studies, alongside faunal and climate data, enabling us to extrapolate activities and potential motivations for behaviours within the landscape. As at least four bout coupé handaxes have now been found in this part of the Thames floodplain terrace, it is possible that a larger and less-disturbed lithic scatter of this period that includes handaxes may be discovered in the area, enabling us to learn more about Neanderthal populations and their movements and activities within the Thames floodplain landscape.

The handaxe has maximum dimensions of 94 mm long, 71 mm wide and 23 mm thick and weighs 176 g, falling within the range of size, shape and refinement for bout coupé handaxes.⁴ It is plano-convex in profile but, as it is not possible to be certain whether the central scar on the flatter side is an original flake ventral surface, the blank form remains indeterminate. The biface is made on dark grey-black flint, with a chert inclusion forming a 'D'-shaped area between the middle and tip on the convex side and a similar but smaller area of chert in reverse on the flatter surface. There is a more diffuse area of cherty material that runs from the tip almost to the butt and a wavy cherty line running from side to side through the centre of the biface. The flint is unpatinated. The handaxe is in good condition with slightly abraded surfaces although the edges, particularly the butt, are damaged. Flake removals on both surfaces range from shallow to deep, indicating both soft and hard hammer use. Several flake scars terminate in hinge and step fractures, particularly where they meet the chert inclusion. The left margin of the convex side has an area of preparation formed by the removal of two shallow, sub-parallel scars, from which has been struck a deep short flake to form a notch on

¹ J.A. Tyldesley, 'Two Bout Coupé Handaxes from Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 47 (1983), p. 152; eadem, *The Bout Coupé Handaxe: A Typological Problem*, BAR BS, 170 (1987), p. 40.

² W.A. Boisismier et al. (eds.) *Neanderthals among Mammoths: Excavations at Lynford Quarry, Norfolk* (2012).

³ M.J. White and P.B. Pettit, 'The British Late Middle Paleolithic: An Interpretative Synthesis of Neanderthal Occupation at the North-Western Edge of the Pleistocene World', *Journal of World Prehistory*, 24:1 (2011), p. 27.

⁴ Tyldesley, *The Bout Coupé Handaxe*, pp. 105–8.

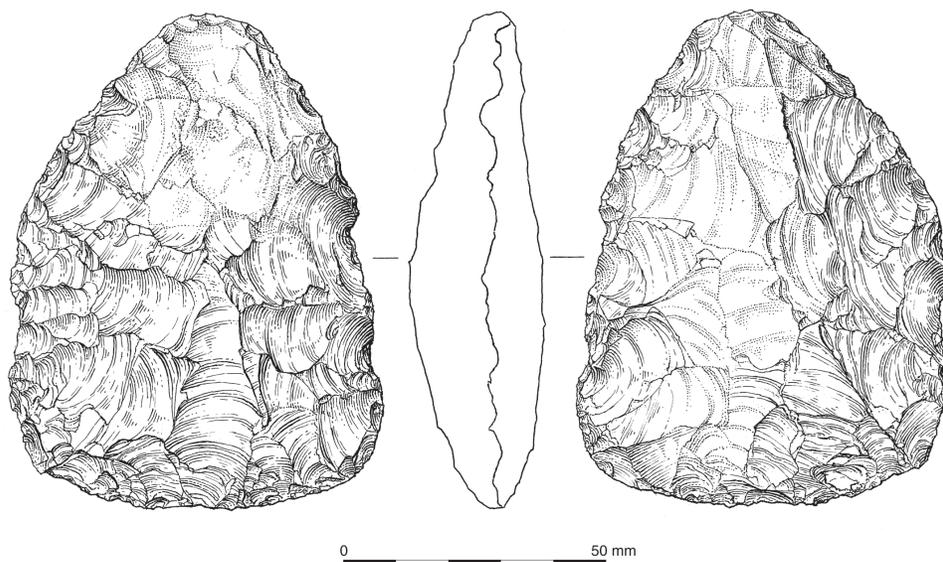


Fig. 1. The handaxe from Tuckwell's Pit. Drawing by Jeffrey Wallis.

the flatter side of the handaxe. The opposite side has two similar notches but they lack signs of deliberate preparation on the opposing surface and are most likely to be post-depositional edge damage caused by rolling in the gravels.⁵

GERALDINE CRANN

⁵ Thanks are due to Geoffrey Cross for the loan of the bout coupé biface, to Jeffrey Wallis for the illustration and to Dr Rob Hosfield for his expert guidance.