

NOTES.

1. THREE TANGED FLINT POINTS FROM SCOTLAND.

The three points which form the subject of this note, were included in the collection of Prehistoric material which was presented to the Hunterian Museum by Mr A. Henderson Bishop. They appear to be a type of flint artifact whose existence has not previously been noticed as an aspect of the Scottish Mesolithic cultures.¹

Flint points, with the basal end reduced in width and blunted by secondary trimming either on one side ("shouldered points") or on both sides ("tanged points") are a regular feature of the Upper Palæolithic cultures of North-Western Europe and of many of the Mesolithic cultures which derive therefrom,² but true tanged points are relatively rare in British post-Glacial flint industries. No examples of Mesolithic date are published from sites which have yielded typical post-Glacial industries of devolved Upper Palæolithic facies, such as Mother Grundy's Parlour, Creswell Crags, Derbyshire³ or King Arthur's Cave, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire.⁴ Mr A. D. Lacaille, however, has recently published one primitive example from Caldey Island, Pembrokeshire.⁵

As will be shown, the three points here discussed all occurred in circumstances which make their post-Palæolithic date unquestionable: the relation of the Tree point (see below) to the Early Post-Glacial Raised Beach suggests that this example must date, at the earliest, from late in the Mesolithic period. Mr Lacaille has pointed out⁶ that the survival of Palæolithic remains in Scotland would only be possible in sheltered cave-sites, since the last major glaciation would effectively obliterate all archaeological material on open sites. Since none of these points shows signs of either ice-striation or water-rolling, it is evident that they cannot be derived from Palæolithic deposits and that their deposition in their find-spots must have taken place after the withdrawal of the ice-sheets from those areas and also after the late-Glacial high-level sea had subsided.

1. (Fig. 1, No. 1.) From Millfield, Stronsay, Orkney (N.G.R.: HY/658249). Millfield Farm is situated upon a low-lying area above present-day high water-mark and commands a northerly aspect across Mill Bay. There is no precise record of the locality or of the circumstances of the find.

The point is made on a flake of flint which bears an even, white patina. The striking-platform forms the flat base of the tang and the bulbar (lower) face is completely devoid of any secondary trimming. The width of the tang is reduced

¹ Acknowledgment must be made of the help I have received from many friends and colleagues in the preparation of this note: Miss Anne S. Robertson, of the Hunterian Museum, Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, of the National Museum of Antiquities, and Mr A. D. Lacaille, of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, have all given me the benefit of their criticisms and advice. I have also had the privilege of discussing these points with Professor J. G. D. Clark and of receiving his opinion of them.

² For examples from British Upper Palæolithic sites, see A. L. Armstrong, *J. Roy. Anthr. Inst.*, LV (1925), 146-75.

³ Armstrong, *op. cit.*

⁴ J. G. D. Clark, *The Mesolithic Age in Britain* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 38-39.

⁵ *Arch. Camb.*, CIV (1955), fig. 23, No. 15.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the problems regarding the presence of Palæolithic objects in Scotland, see A. D. Lacaille, *The Stone Age in Scotland* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 1-91.

by somewhat irregular flaking on both sides, struck from the bulbar face; there are also slight traces of a microlithic retouch at the point. The secondary flaking of the tang consists of the removal of small, shallow, irregular flakes and the edge between the trimming-scars and the bulbar face is much battered and broken. The edges of the flake, on both sides of the point, show extensive traces of wear.

2. (Fig. 1, No. 2.) From Brodgar, Stenness, Mainland, Orkney (N.G.R.: HY/2913). The Ness of Brodgar is a low-lying spit of land, dividing the Loch of Stenness from the Loch of Harray. Again, the circumstances of the find are

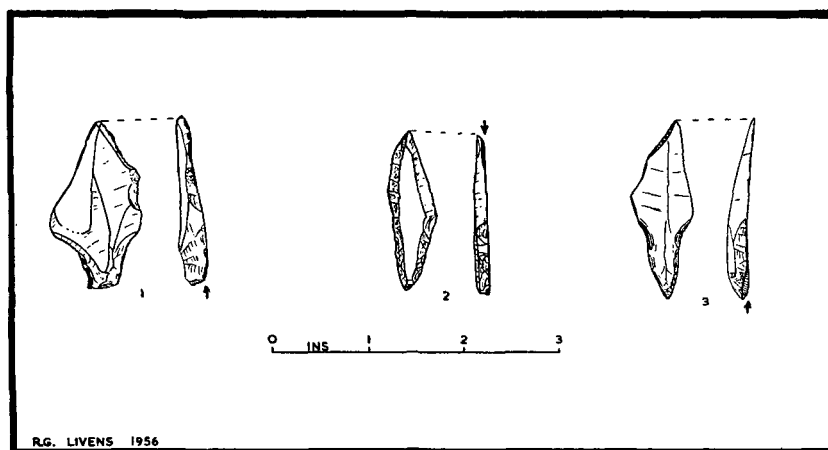


Fig. 1.

not recorded, but the presence of this flint, in a fresh condition, on a site which must have been submerged by any rise in the sea-level, again argues for a post-Glacial date for its deposition.

This sub-triangular point is a portion of a flake, struck off a prepared core. Secondary trimming has removed the striking-platform and the bulb of percussion, but the direction of the surviving pressure-rings shows that the tang has been fabricated on the upper end of the original flake. The flint is translucent, greyish-white in colour. The tang is formed by a steep retouch along the whole of the long side of the flake and along one of the short sides; the third side is the original flake-edge. The retouch recalls the Upper Palæolithic style of flint-work; it is worked from the bulbar face and is noticeably more controlled and regular than that which formed the tang of the Stronsay point.

3. (Fig. 1, No. 3.) From the Red Mound, Ballevullin, Tiree (N.G.R.: NL/9546). This point was evidently found in the course of excavations conducted by Mr Henderson Bishop on the Ballevullin sand-dune site. The area was rich in occupation-material, which ranged from flints of Mesolithic aspect to Iron Age and Medieval pottery and metal-work. It is possible that the Red Mound may be, in part, an Obanian shell-mound, but there are no definite clues to the age and cultural affinities of the occupation.¹ Since the whole of the Ballevullin area

¹ The finds from these excavations, as yet unpublished, are deposited in the Hunterian Museum.

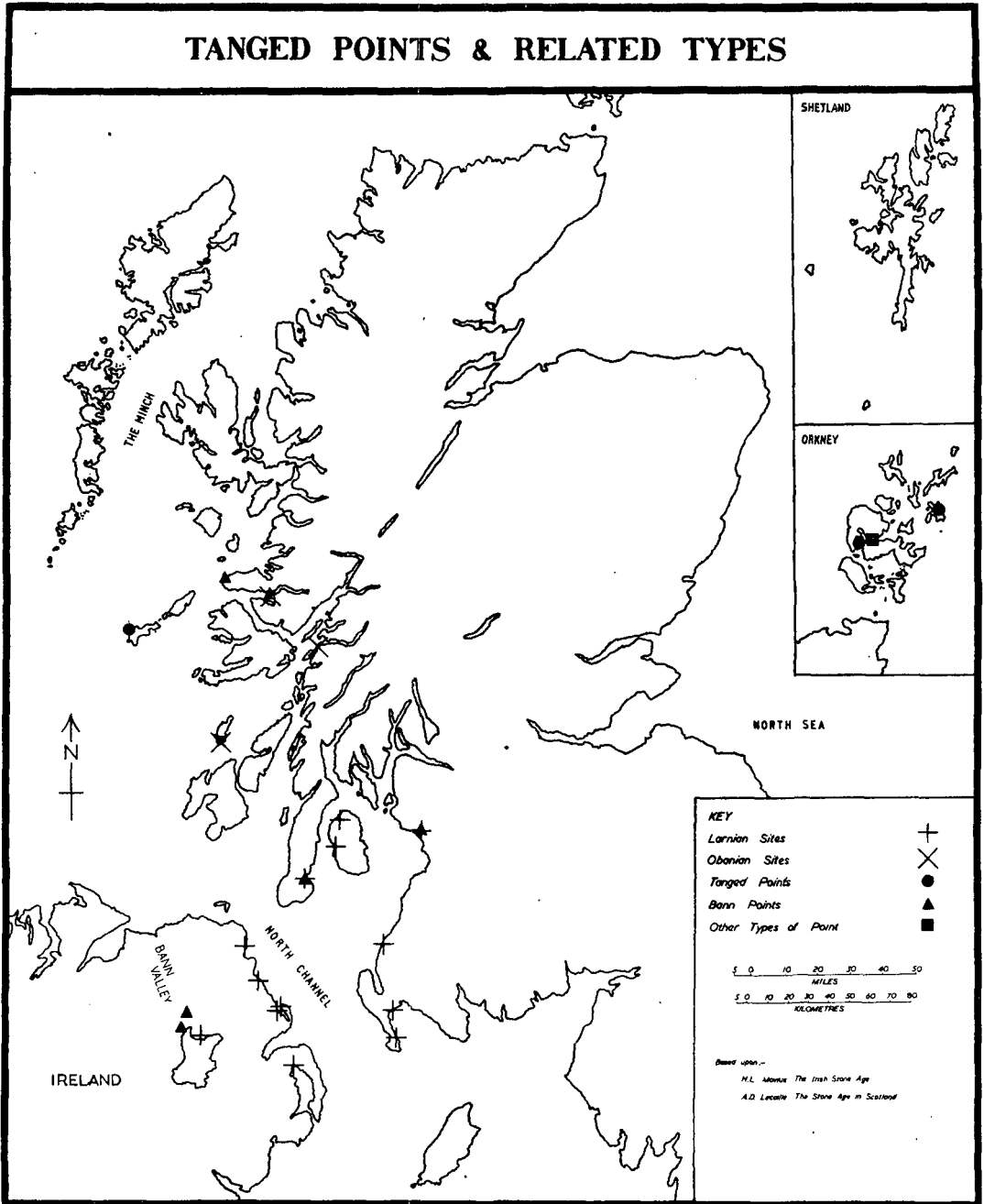


Fig. 2.

seems to have been submerged by the Early Post-Glacial marine transgression, it is evident that any occupation-material found in the area must post-date that transgression, unless it shows signs of water-rolling.

This point is a roughly sub-triangular flake of whitish-grey flint, struck off a prepared core; the tang is formed by steep trimming on both sides of the bulbar end. The secondary trimming resembles that of the Stronsay point in both the nature of the flake-scars and the broken edge between those scars and the bulbar face. The point is formed of the edge of the original flake on the right, backed against a microlithic retouch on the left.

The map (fig. 2) shows the distribution of these flints and other related types in Scotland: it is noticeable that all these points have come from sites close to the present-day sea-shore. Their rarity makes it dangerous to base too definite a conclusion on their distribution, but it may be noted that all these finds were made in areas which must be regarded as the ultimate fringe of the Highland Zone of Britain,¹ where the survival of traditions which have been supplanted long previously in the Lowland Zone is only to be expected.

As suggested above, the chronology of these points is reasonably clear: there is no question of any of them being of Palæolithic date, since they occur, in the open, in areas which have been subject to considerable fluctuations of sea-level since Late-Glacial times. The evidence of the point from Tiree suggests that it must post-date the Early Post-Glacial marine transgression and it may, in fact, date from well after that event.

Typologically, these three flints may be divided into two groups, although too rigid a classification would be inadvisable as we have so few examples. It may be said, though, that while the Tiree and Stronsay points generally resemble each other and can conveniently be discussed together as *Group A*, the Stenness point differs from these examples in both form and workmanship and falls into a different category, described as *Group B*.

Group A.—These two points are characterised by the manufacture of the tang on the bulbar end of the flake by means of an irregular retouch; coupled with this relatively coarse trimming on the tang, both these points show microlithic trimming at or near the point. The tang is the thickest part of the point and the bulb, or part of it, is preserved.

The closest parallels for these points of *Group A* to be found outside Scotland are probably those associated with Palæolithic industries of a Font Robert facies in France.² The French examples are Upper Palæolithic in date, so a direct connection between the tanged points of the two areas and a derivation of the Scottish points from a French ancestry cannot be seriously considered. The Font Robert group, however, represents an isolated, final development of the Aurignacian culture in France. Since an Aurignacian tradition was well rooted in Britain and developed, in isolation, into the Creswellian culture, it is possible that in both Britain and France, a similar type of tanged point was evolved at different times. In this connection, it is noteworthy that almost identical points with those under discussion occur in the Lyngby³ and Ahrensburg⁴ cultures of

¹ See Sir Cyril Fox, *The Personality of Britain* (3rd. Ed., Cardiff, 1938).

² Cf. D. Peyrony, *Éléments de Préhistoire* (Paris, 1948), pp. 60–62. Mr A. D. Lacaille recently showed me a cast of a flint point of Font Robert facies found by Dr W. H. C. Frenck at Combe Capelle (*Bull. de la Soc. Préhist. Française*, XLVIII, 1951); this bore an extremely close resemblance to the Tiree point (No. 3).

³ *Danske Oldsager*, No. 72.

⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 74.

Northern Europe; the Ahrensburg points bear the closest resemblance to the Scottish examples, for not only is the tang formed by a retouch, but the point is formed by oblique secondary trimming.

The occurrence of these similar types, covering a wide range of both space and time, suggests that such resemblances as may occur should be due to parallel development from an ultimately common origin, rather than to a more direct relationship.

Group B.—The clear differences between the point from Stenness and those of *Group A* make it evident that an entirely different flint-working technique is represented by this example. Apart from the neatness of the secondary trimming, noted above, the major difference between this point and the *Group A* examples is the extension of this trimming along the entire length of the longest side of the point. The actual point is formed by the junction of one edge of the original flake and this secondary trimming. Thanks to the removal of the bulb of percussion, the thickness of this point is far more uniform than that of the *Group A* points.

Numbers of points generally similar to the Stenness example are known from the Orkneys¹: these are generally similar in form and vary considerably in the nature of the retouch and in the distribution of the secondary flaking. Mr Lacaille has recognised that these artifacts represent a decayed, Upper Palaeolithic flint-working tradition.² Noticeably similar points occur in the Fosna Culture of West Norway³; this culture seems to derive immediately from the Komsa Culture of Finmark and ultimately from a devolution of the Upper Palaeolithic flint-working tradition. In spite of the formal differences between them, it seems likely that this group of points, like those of *Group A*, represents an element of the survival of the Upper Palaeolithic tradition in remote areas until late in the Mesolithic period and possibly even later.

In this consideration of tanged points, it may be opportune to discuss briefly a third class of point which has hitherto not been known to be well represented among the Scottish material. In addition to the tanged point, which was reduced in width at the base, there was evolved in Post-Glacial times a separate type which was reduced in thickness at the base. These are commonest in Ireland in an epi-Mesolithic context and are known as "Bann Points":⁴ they seem to represent yet another aspect of the devolved Upper Palaeolithic flint-working tradition. Leaf-shaped flakes, with the base reduced in thickness by rough trimming, are known from Mesolithic contexts in both Ireland⁵ and Scotland,⁶ but the truly developed "Bann Point" has not hitherto been noted in Scotland. The five examples portrayed (fig. 3) are all in the Hunterian Museum. While somewhat smaller than normal Irish examples, a difference which is probably due solely to the use of inferior raw material, these examples are in every way typical. No. 1 is made of translucent quartz; it was found on Shewalton Moor, Irvine, Ayrshire. Its exact relation to other finds from the area is not known, but it would appear to be post-Mesolithic in date.⁷ No. 2 is of white and brown mottled flint and comes from Drymen Sands, Ardnamurchan, Argyllshire: among the

¹ Lacaille, *Stone Age in Scotland*, p. 270, fig. 119, Nos. 3-5.

² Lacaille, *loc. cit.*

³ J. G. D. Clark, *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe* (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 53 and 69.

⁴ H. L. Movius, *The Irish Stone Age* (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 239-52.

⁵ Lacaille, *Stone Age in Scotland*, fig. 49, No. 8; fig. 50, No. 6.

⁶ Lacaille, *op. cit.*, fig. 54, No. 5.

⁷ Lacaille, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-288.

poor selection of flint-work from the site, it is the only really determinate artifact. Nos. 3, 4 and 5, which are all of white flint, are of exceptional interest. They occurred among the extensive flint industry which was recovered by Mr Henderson Bishop in the excavation of the Obanian shell-mound at Risga, Argyllshire. The site, which was evidently occupied for an extended period, yielded numbers

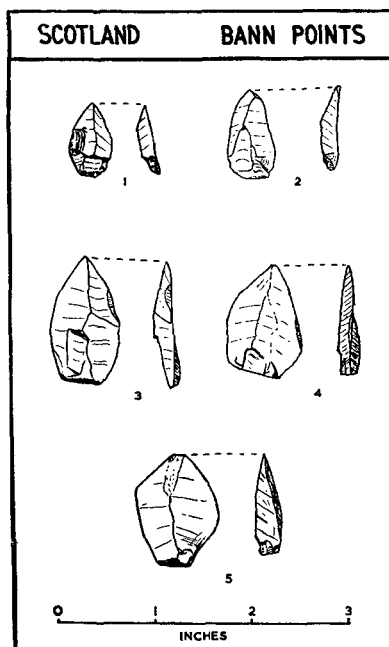


Fig. 3.

of other flint artifacts of a generally devolved Upper Palæolithic aspect and, in addition, bone and antler tools, which may be regarded as typically Obanian.¹ It is not clear to what extent the flint industry from Risga is typical of the Obanian culture as a whole, but it does suggest that a devolved Palæolithic tradition, possibly of Larnian derivation, played a major part in the flint industry on this particular site.

To conclude, then, we may say that the points which have been discussed here all seem to demonstrate the survival of a lingering, degenerate, Upper Palæolithic tradition of flint-working in the remoter areas of Scotland, long after such a tradition had been supplanted or absorbed elsewhere in the British Isles. The range of types here described shows the variety of developments which took place within this tradition in the relatively isolated conditions of North-Western Scotland.

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¹ Part of the material from this site has been published by Mr Lacaille (*Archæologia*, xciv (1951), 103-39); much significant material has come to light since that publication was prepared, however, and a further report is in preparation.