

18-July-95

FWP31a

Summary and interpretation of flint reports

(Robert Johnston – 18 July-95)

Methodology

The flint reports must be preceded by a short note on the recovery methods used and the analytical techniques employed by Anne Everton. The following is a full version, I would have thought only a few lines would suffice in the publication.

The primary concern with the recovery of the artefacts is the extent to which differentiation was made between naturally and human struck flints. Everton wrote in the ODXI report (pp12):

'only the more deliberately struck flakes were collected together with naturally fractured flakes of uncertain identity'.

Recent work on flint technology has looked towards the investigation of *operational chains*. This involves the study of the flint nodule through all the stages of manufacture to use and finally discard. The result of this work has been to realise that although retouched tools are the most recognisable, it is in fact the so called 'waste' which is utilised much of this waste being small and indistinguishable from small natural flakes). Our analysis of any flint assemblage must take full account of these 'waste' flakes. The primary reason for this distinction is that retouched edges do not provide good cutting edges, a retouched edge is often created to provide a blunt section with which to haft or hold the tool. The importance of this point is that selective recovery may, in the case of ODXI at least, have biased the interpretation. The absence of sieving on the sites may well have meant the loss of a large proportion of waste flint but as I have suggested above this would have little effect to the interpretation in a 1970's context.

The interpretative report is concise and is advantaged by the amount of data which has been provided. For that very reason it is possible to recognise the analytical methods used and assess which may be unsuitable for publication. A reading of recent excavations reports (e.g. Maiden Castle) reveals that the biggest difference is the use of tool classification. It is less acceptable to refer to a knife, an awl, or a 'spoke-share'. With the possible exception of arrowheads, tools are accepted as being multi purpose. For example, scrapers, once solely associated with the working of skins, can now be shown, through experimental work and use-wear analysis, to be employed cutting and stripping the bark off wood, cutting plants etc...

This is a major methodological problem and affects the whole of the report. For that reason I have suggested a number of points which can be used constructively and which may be compared to the results from other sites.

1. The quantity of waste material may be used to indicate whether the assemblage represents local flint working or the chance discard of utilised tools.
2. The presence of cores is another indication of local reduction sequences, this is likely in an area rich in flint deposits and would be of more relevance if it indicated the transport of nodules over longer distances.
3. Diagnostic flints may be present which result from technologies associated with particular periods. The form of technology employed can be assessed where possible, for example, the use of prepared striking platforms. At this stage it is useful to compare other local sites.
4. The context of the flints (i.e. ditch, lynchet etc..) will explain the possible post-depositional processes which affected their final position. This will help identify diagnostic types which could date the feature.
5. Finally, a comparison could be made between the assemblages to indicate if any spatial or temporal patterning exists. This is not of prime value but, considering the lack of spatial data at a site level, it may offer some interesting results.

Site summaries and interpretation

1 - 'FLI - flints from the lynchet Fyfield Down' (Everton, 2-4)

The flaked stone from FLI was entirely from local flint and had two distinct patination types. The assemblage consisted of 80% unretouched flakes. This indicates reduction processes were taking place on the site. No cores were found and it may be that reduction was secondary with flake cores being used. This has been identified at Cranborne Chase as being post 2000 BC (Brown 1991, 129). The technology used reflects at the earliest an LNeo/EBA date with the presence of a tanged points. While the broad form of the flakes reflects an EBA-LBA date as seen at Maiden Castle (Edmonds and Bellamy 1991) and Micheldever Wood (Fasham and Ross 1978). The flints are from the lynchet which is itself pre-late Roman (FWP 9). The technology of the flint working indicates at least EBA though if compared to the Maiden Castle results a date further into the BA seems more likely.

2 - ODI Flints from ditch section (Everton, 5)

The assemblage is made up of flint with two distinct levels of patination. 68% of the assemblage consisted of unretouched flakes, no cores were present. This may indicate some localised reduction of flake cores similar to the industries identified at Cranborne Chase post 2000 BC (Brown 1991, 129). The distribution of the flints within the ditch and excavated ground surface indicates no relationship between stratigraphical position and patination group (fig 5). All the finds all lie within or just above the 'flints and soil' layer. Within

the ditch a similar situation exists and it is likely the finds were deposited from, the now absent, 'flints and soil' which lay at the lip of the ditch. The pottery associated with this is Beaker (identified by Isobel Smith) and may date this technology and deposit to EBA. Unfortunately measurements were not taken of the ODI flakes and it is not possible to compare the finds with those from other local sites. The dominance of scrapers is typical, as is the relative proportion of 'waste' flakes.

3 - ODII: flints from around the 'polissoir' (Everton, 6-8)

The assemblage was made up of unpatinated grey flint with a small number of white patinated flakes. Unretouched flakes made up c.86% of the total, 3 cores were also present. Of the cores, 2 had only single working platforms while the third had 2 platforms perpendicular to each other. The presence of a double platform core suggests the flints are pre-MBA since investigations in the rest of the Marlborough Downs suggest single platform, unprepared cores are used by this period (Harding 1992, 127). This interpretation is supported by the fine nature of the retouch on the 3 convex scrapers, considered to be of a LNeo/EBA date. Only the leaf-shaped arrowheads are unusual in this context, the heavy patination on their surface may indicate they are from an earlier context. The presence of a flake from a polished flint axe may indicate a direct link to activity around the stone. Certainly stone axes have been dated in Britain till at least 1750 bc (uncal) (Smith 1979, 13) and the flint assemblage appears to date from around the 2000 bc mark. The presence of cores and a high proportion of unretouched flakes suggests this may have been a manufacture site, comparing well with the proposed function of the 'polissoir'.

4 - ODIII

The assemblage was made up of a grey/brown flint of which only one leaf-shaped arrowhead was patinated. c.66% of the flakes were unretouched while only one single platform core was present. Apart from one elegant, elongated, bifacially retouched arrow/javelinhead, many of the retouched pieces were roughly made on broad flakes (fig 2). This has been interpreted by Anne Everton as being of a LNeo/EBA date but the poor quality of the manufacture contrasts with ODII and it seems more likely that a date more firmly in the BA should be suggested. The context of the flints with a sarsen structure fits better in a M-LBA date since as yet we have ?no evidence for EBA structures on the downs.

5 - ODXI

The assemblage is made up of predominately patinated flint of which three separate categories were recognised. Only c.60% of the assemblage consisted of unretouched flakes and only one, heavily patinated core was present. The patination groups identified by Everton appear to correspond

with two assemblages. The medium patinated retouched pieces include long end-scrapers and side-scrapers while the heavily patinated flints included large convex scrapers and hollow scrapers. The context of the assemblage within a LBA/EIA enclosure is secondary since at least the heavily patinated flints show a technology similar to that found at the MNeo assemblage at Windmill Hill (Smith 1965).

6 - ODXII: general finds

The assemblage was dominated by 'naturally fractured' flakes while the remaining flints showed varying degrees of patination and post-depositional damage. c.60% of the utilised flints were unretouched, while no cores were present. Much of the material was poorly struck suggesting a later prehistoric date (Ford *et al* 1984); only one possible Windmill Hill Class A flake may be earlier (Smith 1965, 92). A small flint amulet or bead made from a fossil sponge was the only unusual piece from the assemblage. It seems likely that the assemblage is well mixed although there is a dominance of BA flakes.

7 - ODXII: lynchet

Although this assemblage was recovered by sieving only a small proportion of utilised flakes were recovered. Natural flakes dominated and were unique in being more heavily patinated than the utilised flakes. c. 65% of the flakes were unretouched although this is of little value considering the small sample size (17 utilised flakes). No cores were found although one flake showed evidence that it had come from a prepared platform core. The use of prepared platforms is more likely to be earlier than the BA (Harding 1992, 127). However, the presence of denticulate can be compared with the BA assemblage at Maiden Castle (Edmonds and Bellamy 1991, 220). The absence of diagnostic flints and the small number of flakes present prevents any definite conclusions.

Overall conclusions

It is clear from the above summaries that the Fyfod sites are not chronologically similar. There are no flints which can be definitely assigned to the Mesolithic. Of the earliest the Windmill Hill Class A flake from ODXII and the heavily patinated flints from ODXI all appear to be MNeo with maybe a few possible ENeo flakes throughout the assemblages. The LNeo/EBA is represented in the assemblages at ODI and ODII, FLI may be included but the presence of a large proportion of piercers suggests a slightly later date. Assemblages characteristic of later in the BA are found at ODIII and ODXI, however this chronological distinction is not clear and there may be BA flakes at ODII and FLI.

Clearly the conclusions are not definite but it demonstrates the likelihood of Neolithic activity in the area, while the LNeo/EBA is clearly represented. This

is most interesting at ODII where the proportion of unretouched flakes and the presence of cores reflects localised reduction sequences. The BA is, unsurprisingly, represented at a number of locations and particularly in association with the sarsen structure at ODIII.

Bibliography

Brown A 1991 'Structured deposition and technological change among the flaked stone artefacts from Cranborne Chase' *in* Barrett, Bradley and Hill: 101-133.

Edmonds M and Bellamy P 1991 'The flaked stone' *in* Sharples *Maiden Castle*: 214-228.

Fasham P J & Ross J M 1978 'A Bronze Age flint industry from a barrow site in Micheldever Wood, Hampshire' *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* **44**: 47-67.

Ford S, Bradley R, Hawkes J and Fischer P 1984 'Flint working in the metal age' *Oxford J Archaeol* **3**(2): 157-73.

Harding P 1992 'The flint' *in* Gingell *Marlborough Downs*: 123-132.

Smith I F 1965 *Windmill Hill and Avebury: excavations by Alexander Kieller, 1925-1939*, Oxford.

----- 1979 'The chronology of British stone implements' *in* Clough T H McK and Cummins W A (eds) *Stone Axe Studies: archaeological, petrological, experimental and ethnographic*, Council British Archaeology Research Report **23** (London): 13-22.