

A Neolithic ground flint axe from the Longcross Estate, near Chobham, Runnymede District

The small ground and partially polished flint axe (fig 1) was discovered on the Longcross Estate, north-east of Chobham, in December 1992. It was found by the estate manager, Ian Buchanan, while riding along a newly-created estate track, from which up to 300mm of topsoil had been removed exposing an underlying pebbly loam.

The findspot lay within a small copse adjacent to and west of a triangular pond at NGR SU 9892 6508, and close to an area which had previously been disturbed by the erection of buildings (now demolished) 'about a hundred years ago' (information from the finder). The triangular pond is one of several occupying the floor of a shallow north-south valley belonging to the Mill Bourne Stream catchment, which drains much of the central Bagshot Table before discharging into the Thames above Weybridge.

The geology in the area of the findspot is composed of the fine-grained cross-bedded sands of the Bagshot Beds, on which have developed acidic stagnogley-podzols of Holidays Hill and Wickham 3 Associations (Jarvis *et al* 1983). The poor quality of these soils notwithstanding, it seems likely that prior to the late 3rd or early 2nd millennia BC the Bagshot Table was covered with brown earths capable of sustaining cultivation (eg Macphail & Scaife 1987, 44; Needham 1987, 130-1; Ford 1987, 3 & 66). Today, much of the area comprises wet lowland heath which supports deciduous and coniferous woodland; the Longcross Estate itself is mainly given over to horse pasture following some vegetable growing during the last war (information from the finder).

The axe measures 109mm in length (though it may originally have been longer), 67mm in width, 26mm in thickness and weighs 242.79g. It is made of mottled dark grey/light grey cherty flint, and its high points have been ground and polished, especially towards the blade, which retains a keen cutting edge. A number of flake scars are, however, still evident beneath the ground striae on both faces. It has a somewhat asymmetric form both in profile and cross-section, and the butt has been perfunctorily re-worked such that virtually all traces of grinding and polishing have been removed. Its lenticular cross-section conforms to Field and Woolley's Type B (1984, 87 & fig 2).

The new implement can be added to three other ground flint axes already known from the Longcross area (Field & Woolley 1984, nos 101, 110 & 111). Two of these, formally re-acquisitioned by Weybridge Museum in 1964 (nos 222.1964 & 223.1964), come from the collection of Dr Eric Gardner, one-time Honorary Curator, and must have been found prior to 1915 as they are listed in the Museum's manuscript catalogue compiled in that year (Grenside 1915; information from Ian Platford); nothing further is known of the third.

Together, the four Longcross axes form part of a general scatter of Neolithic finds recovered from the Bagshot Table (see Field & Cotton 1987, fig 4.7) and, though not in themselves closely datable within the period, may have belonged to pioneering elements within local Neolithic communities foraging inland from the Thames. To those Thameside sites quoted by Needham in his discussion of the middle Neolithic deposits at Runnymede Bridge (Needham & Trott 1987, 481-2; Needham 1991, 370-4), can be added the two small enclosures recently excavated at Staines Road Farm, Shepperton in historic Middlesex (Jones 1990), and Manor Farm, Lower Horton, Berkshire (Digby 1990; Steve Ford pers comm).

The axe has now been returned to its finder.

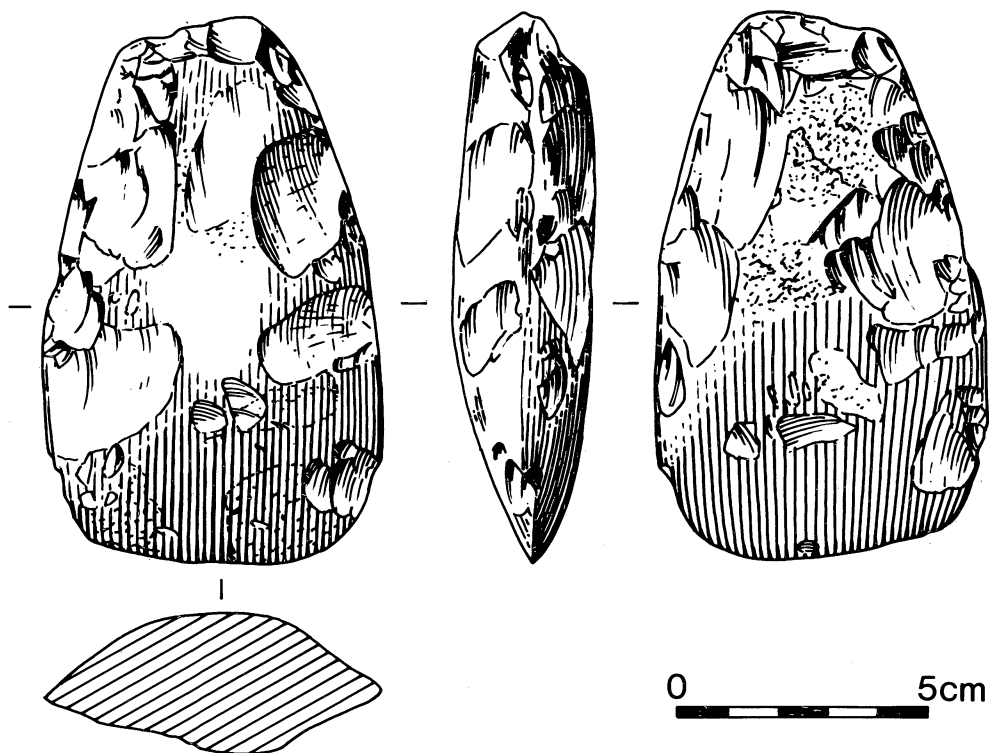


Fig 1 A Neolithic axe from the Longcross Estate near Chobham

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Ian Buchanan for bringing his find to the attention of Andy Wragg (Surrey County Council Ranger for Chobham Common, who in turn reported it to David Bird) and for confirming details of its discovery; to Rob Poulton (Surrey County Archaeology Unit) for access to the county Sites & Monuments Record, and to David Field (RCHME) and to Jocelyn Barker and Ian Platford (Elmbridge Museum), for answering various queries relating to the previous Longcross finds.

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