

The Late George W. Smith of Reading.

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MANY people in Reading knew G.W.S., and the more fortunate knew him intimately. Most retiring and quiet in disposition, he either recalled in a moment, or could place his finger upon the reference concerning almost any local matter. His interest was real and intense; his memory astonishing. What thrilled him most was to be on the spot first whenever objects were being dug up. In fact, we almost believe he could sense a pot, coin, flint implement, rare book or legend. The joy he felt and his enthusiasm were infectious. There is written evidence that as a young man in the Bank he was a keen collector of flint implements (which did not then attract the attention of collectors which they do to-day). He would run all the way to Caversham and back in his lunch hour to secure a specimen from a gravel pit.

G.W.S. did not impart his vast stores of local knowledge by lecturing but by personal contact with his intimate friends. It was an experience to go with him to the White Horse above the Vale; over a glass of ale he would recite with gusto the "Scouring of the White Horse"—of course, in Berkshire dialect.

Now our colleague is gone. His memory and collections remain. We are fortunate in having his entire collection of prehistoric material as a legacy to Reading Museum.

One would wish for fuller notes on many items, but we now have to make the best job we can in permanently recording a collection which locally is equalled only by that of the late Lt. Treacher (which has been passed to the University Museum at Oxford). Appended are some notes on the more important items in the G. W. Smith Collection.

THE G. W. SMITH COLLECTION.

The Smith Collection covers a vast range in both time and space. Local material ranges from lower palaeolithic implements to such recent "byegones" as balances for weighing sovereigns and guineas, and the sheet metal "fire marks" issued by insurance companies. Among the non-local objects are neolithic implements from Scandinavia and ethnographic material from as far afield as Easter Island. As might be expected, the scientific value of the material is varied. Most of it consists of choice "collectors' pieces" rather than of any scientifically assembled series. Only in the last 15 or 20 years of his life did G. W. Smith appear to realise the importance of acquiring together *all* the relevant material from a site, however uninspiring much of it might appear. A still graver weakness of the collection is its uneven documentation. Many of the items are labelled with locality, date and with accession



FIG. 1. Middle Acheulian pointed biface in grey flint from Toots Farm, Caversham. 12 : 15.

numbers referring back to his three volumes of notes covering the period 1885-1941. Nevertheless, several thousand of the flint implements are either completely unlabelled or marked only with the date at which they were acquired. The notebooks are often helpful in the information that they give, but contain much irrelevant data and many gaps.

This is not the place to describe the "foreign" material. The unifying theme of the local material is, naturally, the Thames and its tributaries. Nearly all the palaeoliths came from the terrace gravels, and a high proportion of the later antiquities from "Thames picks" to mediaeval keys were dredged from the present bed of the Thames.

The palaeoliths, besides many hundred unlabelled examples, comprise nearly 750 labelled specimens, mostly from the gravels in the immediate neighbourhood of Reading and Caversham. The labelling is in most cases sufficient to attribute an implement to a particular gravel pit; only in the rarest cases is there more detailed information on the depth and other circumstances of the find. Also, like most other private collectors of the period, he generally ignored flakes; only the more shapely examples or those with fine retouch were collected. Core-tools are thus unduly prominent. Nevertheless, implements from some sites are sufficiently numerous for conclusions of value to be drawn from them; the collection now awaits detailed study in conjunction with the other palaeolithic material in the Museum.

The bulk of the bifacial implements appear to be of Middle Acheulian types, though the ovate forms so typical of the Somme valley are rarely met with apart from the large series from a pit near the "Roebuck" Hotel, Tilehurst. Abbevillian and Early Acheulian types are rare, and, when they occur, are generally heavily rolled. The final forms of the hand-axe—the Levallois and Combe Capelle types—are hardly represented. Clactonian flakes are well represented from some sites, though Levallois flakes are rare.

There are over 130 implements from the classic Upper Furze Platt pit at Maidenhead; over 200 from the pits that formerly existed at Toots Farm (*Fig. 1*) on Caversham Heights; over 100 from other sites on Caversham Heights; over 120 from near the "Roe-buck" at Tilehurst; 50 from the Grovelands pit in Tilehurst Road, Reading, and many smaller series from other sites. The heights above the present level of the Thames at which these implements have been found range from about 140 feet at Emmer Green to about 20 feet in sites along Oxford Road, Reading.

Upper palaeolithic types of implements are unrepresented in the Smith Collection, though a quantity of unpatinated flint flakes from the bed of the Thames at Tilehurst have been claimed by some of be Aurignacian. They might equally well be mesolithic and would thus conform in date with the "Thames picks" so

abundant from the same site. Almost all of the 90 examples of these picks in the collection were dredged from the river, mostly in the Tilehurst and Purley area. Most, though not all, show the typical *tranchet* cutting edge; many, by their asymmetrical section, appear to have functioned as adzes.

The local neolithic and early bronze age objects in the collection are very numerous. The outstanding pieces are the two perfect Neolithic B-type bowls from the Thames at Mongewell which have already been published on more than one occasion (*Plate No. 1*). In addition, there are over 20 polished flint celts and 9 ground and polished stone celts and a dozen perforated implements—axe-hammers, mace-heads, etc. All these are isolated finds. Some were dredged from the Thames and Kennet; others were discovered in building and road-making operations in Reading and neighbourhood. Their chief value is in furnishing data for distribution maps. When the ground and polished celts of non-local stone have been petrologically examined, interesting information can be expected on their sources of origin and the routes by which they were traded.

Nearly 600 flint arrowheads are included in the Collection. Except for two or three from the Reading neighbourhood, they come from two main areas: the Vale of White Horse around Fernham, Pusey and Faringdon; and from the dip-slope of the Cotswolds around Witney and Chadlington—an area from which many other collections of arrowheads have been formed. Tanged-and-barbed forms predominate over leaf and lozenge types.

Of greater interest than many of these isolated finds are a few small series of flint implements from workshop or occupation sites. Such is a group of white-patinated flakes, a round scraper and a fabricator from the edge of a wood on the golf links at Emmer Green. Another small group comes from a site in Hemdean Bottom, Caversham; and a third, including celts, picks and an arrowhead or two, from the fields between Southcote Manor and Southcote Lodge, Reading.

The bronze age is represented by a fine series of bronze implements, mostly dredged from the Thames and Kennet. Earliest in point of date is a flat riveted dagger from the Thames at Sonning (*Plate IV. A.*) of the type sometimes associated with A-C beakers. Of similar date and from the same locality is an archer's stone bracer. Middle bronze age types are well represented by 4 perfect looped-and-socketed spearheads, two of which are from the Kennet at Burghfield (*Plate IV. B & C.*) and one from the Thames at Tilehurst; and by four palstaves, two of which are also from Tilehurst. Among late bronze age types are: a socketed knife or dagger and a (broken) socketed spearhead from the Thames at Tilehurst; a leaf-shaped sword from the Kennet at Burghfield (*Plate No. II. A.*) and another from the Thames at Bray. From the latter site also comes a fine pair of socketed-and-barbed spearheads (*Plate III.*)

From Wargrave there is a socketed celt, a faceted and ribbed form with circular mouth to the socket (*Plate No. IV. D.*). The only example of bronze age pottery in the Collection is an incomplete barrel-shaped urn of Deverel-Rimbury type, containing calcined bones, from Talbot's gravel pit, Caversham.

The early iron age is poorly represented. A shallow saucer-shaped vessel from Caversham Hill, ornamented externally with paired finger-tip impressions round the rim is probably of this period. On the other hand, Romano-British material is fairly abundant. There are a large number of small bone and metal objects and Samian bases with potters' stamps and a few small bronze statuettes. Most of these objects probably came from Silchester, though not one is labelled. Among labelled objects are a few complete pots of coarse grey ware dredged from the Thames at various points between Goring and Maidenhead.

There are a few Pagan Saxon objects of some interest. A gilt bronze saucer brooch from the Thames at Sonning (*Plate II. B.*) is closely paralleled by one from Oxfordshire in the British Museum. Four beads, three of them of amber and one of baked clay, come from a solitary burial discovered at Purley when the G.W.R. line was widened. There are also a few minor finds from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery which Smith himself discovered between the G.W.R. line and the Thames, near the "Dreadnought" Inn at Reading. Among Thames finds are several iron axe-heads, some of the *francisca* type which survived into the mediaeval period.

The few mediaeval objects are mostly from sites in Reading. They include a quantity of sherds of typical early cooking-pots from the chalk-pit by St. Peter's Church, Caversham; two gilt and enamelled bronze heraldic pendants from the site of the Post Office in Friar Street; a small carved bone figure of Christ, found in Fobney Street, that was apparently part of a Crucifix, has been attributed to the 11th-12th centuries. Some of the iron keys in the Collection are of mediaeval types.

The Collection contains a considerable quantity of objects from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries; nearly all these are from Reading itself. The pottery of the period contains a large series of earthenware and stoneware bottles and jugs; several of the latter are bellarmines. There is also a number of Delft ointment pots and early glass druggists' phials. The early spoons in the Collection include interesting 17th century types in silver-plated brass and in pewter. Finally, may be mentioned eight sheet copper and lead "fire-marks" of early insurance companies.