

## AN AXE OF DORSET CHERT FROM A MESOLITHIC SITE AT KINTBURY

F. R. FROMM

MESOLITHIC ARTIFACTS OF non-local rock are rare but not unknown in Southern England, and the rock is usually of South Western provenance. Pebble tools constitute the bulk of such finds, but microliths and a graver of Portland chert are recorded from Farnham, while a blade fragment of the same material is recorded from the Frensham Great Pond (South) site (Rankine, 1949, 1956).

The axe, which forms the subject of this paper, was found as a result of the systematic fieldwork undertaken as the first phase of a detailed investigation into the Mesolithic around Hungerford (Fromm, 1963). It was found on the edge of a scatter of Mesolithic artifacts which although not prolific presented a characteristic debris of blade cores, core rejuvenating flakes, waste blades and blade fragments. This site has been designated Wawcott I (national grid SU 389676). The flints are virtually in mint condition and exhibit pale ochreous staining, probably due to staining by peat. They were found associated with occasional thin patches of gravel and this is taken to indicate that the major part of the layer to which they belong, presumably on or just above the gravel, is below the depth reached by normal cultivation. The soil is essentially peat modified by cultivation. It is hoped to carry out a small exploration of this site in the near future.

The axe (Fig. 1) is a large specimen measuring  $8\frac{1}{4}$  in. in length and weighs 1 lb. 7 oz. It is essentially triangular in section with a carefully dressed flat sole, produced by tangential flaking. This has either not been completely successful towards the butt, or the edge has been deliberately battered perhaps to facilitate hafting. One side is very little flaked and probably represents a cleavage plane of the original nodule of chert. The remaining side has been quite carefully flaked. There appears to be a deliberate attempt to shape the axe near the butt as if for hafting, and here the axe is basically quadrangular in section. The original cortex caps the butt, and also a strip along the apex.

The most significant point concerning this artifact is the material from which it is made—chert. Although it presents a brownish appearance, the removal of a flake by a farm implement discloses that this is due to staining, in fact the axe is made from a black chert. In order to trace the origin of the material the artifact was submitted to the Petrographical Department of the Geological Survey and Museum where it was sectioned. Miss A. H. Macdonald kindly contributed the following report:

‘Your specimen is very similar to a black chert in our collection from Shaftesbury, Dorset. It is likely that it was derived from this area’.

This is an interesting result, Shaftesbury is some forty-three miles from the find spot and there is no obvious connection between them, i.e. there is no simple route

# MESOLITHIC AXE FROM KINTBURY

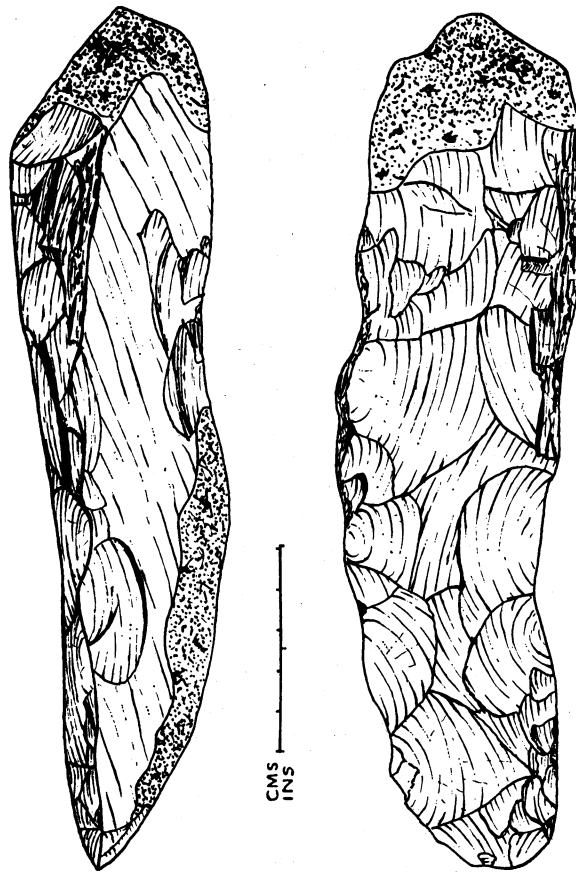


Fig. 1. Mesolithic Axe of Dorset Chert from Kintbury

following river valleys which connects the two areas. Shaftesbury is only five miles from Iwerne Minster, a large and important Mesolithic site from which artifacts of Portland chert are recorded (Summers, 1941), also a tranche of Broome chert. In addition to this site, and those mentioned at the beginning of this paper, sites at Portland, Dorset, Ham Hill, Somerset and Sidmouth, Devon, have produced artifacts of Portland chert (Rankine, 1951). However in the southwest artifacts of Cretaceous chert from the Blackdown Hills, Somerset, and the Haldons, Devon, are frequently met with and are occasionally dominant (Rankine, 1956). At least some groups of Mesolithic people were familiar with chert as a raw material. That other and later knappers also used it, in particular the blue-grey Portland chert, is attested by the existence of transverse leaf and also barbed and tanged arrow-heads of this material. Thus, although the artifact described here is assigned a Mesolithic date on the grounds of context and typology, a post Mesolithic date is not entirely ruled out.

## REFERENCES

- Rankine, W. F. 1949. 'A Mesolithic Survey of the West Surrey Greensand'. Research Paper No. 2 of the Surrey Arch. Society, p. 39.
- Rankine, W. F. 1956. 'The Mesolithic of Southern England'. Research Paper No. 4 of the Surrey Arch. Society. Appendix B 54-6.
- Froom, F. R. 1963. 'The Mesolithic around Hungerford'. Trans. Newbury District Field Club. Vol. II (2) 62-87.
- Summers, P. G. 1941. 'A Mesolithic Site, near Iwerne Minster, Dorset'. Proc. prehist. Soc. 7, 145-6.
- Rankine, W. F. 1951. 'Artifacts of Portland Chert in Southern Britain'. Proc. prehist. Soc. 17, 93.